



File Code: 1950

Date: 1/25/2020

Dear Interested Party:

We are seeking your input on the Pacific Power Nile Spacer Cable System Project on the east slope of the Cascade Range approximately 20 miles northwest of Naches, within northwestern Yakima County. Pacific Power has been evaluating wildfire mitigation throughout its service territory as part of their strategic plan to harden infrastructure from fire and weather risk. As part of this effort, Pacific Power has identified an existing 12.47 kilovolt (kV) distribution power line for rebuild/relocation with the intention of promoting wildfire mitigation and improving access to the line for operations and maintenance.

Pacific Power is proposing to authorize the power line and associated facilities needed to continue electric service to a variety of users within and adjacent to the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) through an amendment to the existing Special Use Permit or under a new authorization that is consistent with the OWNF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). This project requires compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), a variance from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to occupy the right-of-way (ROW) adjacent to Highway 410, and other local and state permits and authorizations.

This letter summarizes the project's need and proposed actions. Access full project information, including maps, project details, public meeting dates, and instructions for subscribing to updates or providing comments at:

https://data-stga.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=59210

In addition to the website provided above, Pacific Power has provided the following website to view project details, project maps, and submit comments:

<https://www.pacificpower.net/nile-project>

Project-specific questions may be submitted directly to Pacific Power at:

WMPYakimaNile@pacificcorp.com.

Where is the Project Located?

The Project is located in central Washington on the east slope of the Cascade Range approximately 20 miles northwest of Naches, within northwestern Yakima County, and primarily within the OWNF. The route generally parallels the Little Naches and American rivers and State Highway 410. Most of the project is located within the OWNF, with a small portion located on private property. Customers fed by this distribution line include recreational cabins, private



residences, ranches, campgrounds, businesses, and other government facilities. The project is located in T. 16 N., R. 15 E. sections 6 and 7; T. 16 N., R. 14 E. sections 1 and 2; T. 17 N., R. 14 E. sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23, 25, 26, 35, and 36; and T. 17 N., R. 13 E. sections 11 and 12 of the Willamette Meridian.

What is Being Proposed?

Pacific Power proposes upgrading approximately 28 miles of existing distribution line. There will be portions of the line that are rebuilt in place within existing Right-of-Way (ROW), portions removed entirely, and areas of new construction (moving the line to the Highway 410 ROW). All construction will involve pole replacements, anchors, guy wires, and new covered overhead conductor (wires). The line removal and new construction will be analyzed under NEPA and SEPA. The rebuild-in-place portion of the project will be considered a maintenance activity and will not be analyzed under NEPA and SEPA.

Based on preliminary estimates, the following details regarding project infrastructure and disturbance quantifications are provided. However, through a more detailed engineering design and alternatives analysis, these preliminary numbers will be refined.

The portion of the Project to be included in the NEPA and SEPA analysis consists of the following primary components:

- Removal of approximately 8.2 miles of existing distribution line and poles presently located in areas that are difficult to access. The removal activities will remove 144 existing wood pole structures. The removal portion of the project also includes removing 11 existing river crossings of the distribution line.
- Construction of approximately 14.4 miles of new distribution line in the Highway 410 ROW. The proposed new construction would include installation of 290 fiberglass poles and new, covered conductor (wire). Trees/brush will be removed along the ROW where required and vegetation management will be implemented for safety/maintenance purposes. The impact area has been conservatively estimated at a 15-foot width (this will vary by pole location due to access and how much existing disturbance associated with the ROW is present at proposed structure locations). The typical permanent disturbance for each structure is estimated at three feet by three feet (nine square feet). The proposed newly constructed portion of the line would include six (6) new river crossings of the distribution line and tree removal along the highway ROW. Vegetation removal will be limited to the greatest extent practicable considering safety and hazard tree concerns for the newly installed line. Every effort will be made to retain large trees and brush that provide shading to the river and temperature refugia for aquatic species.

The portion of the Project not included in the NEPA and SEPA analysis consists of the rebuild-in-place portion that includes 12.3 miles of existing distribution line. The rebuild portion will include the replacement of 323 wood pole structures (exact number of replacement structures dependent on final design) with fiberglass, fire-resistant structures and new covered conductor. No areas outside of the existing ROW are anticipated to be disturbed for this rebuild portion of the line. However, construction activities may require additional work areas dependent on terrain. The rebuild portion would also include reconductoring nine existing river crossings of

the distribution line. The rebuild portion of the project will be considered a maintenance activity and on-going vegetation management will continue to occur in this area.

Why is this Work Needed?

The purpose of this project is to promote fire mitigation activities on identified facilities in the OWNF. As part of this effort, Pacific Power has identified an existing 12.47 kilovolt (kV) distribution power line for rebuild/relocation purposes with the intention of promoting wildfire mitigation. Additional benefits include improving access to the line for operations and maintenance, ensuring continued service for customers and minimizing potential impacts to power service/outages associated with wildfire and weather events.

How will this Proposal be Evaluated?

As leads for this project, the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest will prepare an Environmental Assessment to meet requirements of NEPA and SEPA. The goal of both NEPA and SEPA review is to ensure that responsible officials make decisions that are fully informed, based on a multi-disciplinary analysis of environmental consequences that includes opportunity for public comment. Based on our preliminary assessment, actions proposed in this project are consistent with those evaluated in an environmental assessment.

The proposed action will be consistent with the Wenatchee Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (1994); the Bull Trout Recovery Plan (USFWS 2015); and the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan (USFWS 2011). The Naches District Ranger, Aaron Stockton, is the responsible official for these actions which are subject to a pre-decisional administrative review and objection process under 36 CFR 218.

An interdisciplinary team will review the proposed Project and public comments received during scoping and develop a proposed action that achieves the purpose of the project, promoting fire mitigation, maintaining the distribution of electric power to customers, and minimizing potential impact to power service resulting from wildfire and weather events. The proposed action will be evaluated in the environmental analysis process.

How Do I Submit Comments?

We are inviting you to comment on the proposed Pacific Power Distribution Line Rebuild – Nile Hendrix Project and to share your knowledge of the area with the team planning this work. Comments providing relevant and new information with sufficient detail and rationale are the most useful and are referred to as specific written comments. The scoping period is an opportunity to be involved in the planning process, to offer thoughts on alternative ways to accomplish what is proposed, to comment on the activities, and to work with the parties involved in doing what is right for the land. Your comments will help identify potential issues and concerns with this proposal, helping identify environmental issues that should be analyzed in depth, and eliminating those issues that are not relevant to the project.

Comments will be most useful if received within 30 days of the date of this letter. Please submit your comments electronically through our web-based Comment and Analysis Response Application (CARA) available at the project web page. Attachments to comments must be submitted in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (.rtf), or Adobe Portable Document Format (.pdf). Emails in other formats or identified as potentially containing

viruses will be rejected.

Comments received in response to this initial request, including names, addresses, and any other information provided with the comments will be considered a part of the public record and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and may be released upon request. All comments will be added to a web-based system and can be publicly reviewed in a “reading room” available through the project web page. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their comments are received in a timely manner.

If you do not wish to comment at this time but would like to receive project updates, please visit the project web page for additional information or to subscribe to email bulletins. If we do not hear from you during this scoping period, we will remove you from our notification list for this project.

Questions?

For further information about the Pacific Power Distribution Line Rebuild – Nile Hendrix Project or documents, contact Aaron Stockton by emailing aaron.stockton@usda.gov or by calling 509-653-1415.

Thank you for your interest in promoting wildfire mitigation on the OWNF. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

AARON J. STOCKTON
District Ranger

